

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Fire Station No. 2

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 719 - 723 Van Buren [n/a] not for publication

city or town Topeka [n/a] vicinity

state Kansas code KS county Shawnee code 177 zip code 66603

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this
☒ nomination [] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets [] does
not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [] statewide ☒ locally. (See
continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Richard D. Pankratz, Deputy SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

5-14-02
Date

Kansas State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments [].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

[] entered in the National Register

See continuation sheet [].

[] determined eligible for the National Register

See continuation sheet [].

[] determined not eligible for the National Register.

[] removed from the National Register

[] other, explain:

See continuation sheet [].

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-state
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

contributing

noncontributing

1 building
sites
structures
objects
1 total

Name of related multiple property listing.

NA

**Number of contributing resources
previously listed in the National Register.**

NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Function

GOVERNMENT: fire station

Current Functions

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals:
Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials

foundation Stone: limestone
walls Brick
Stone: limestone
roof Asphalt
other

see continuation sheet [].

see continuation sheet [].

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

See continuation sheet [x]

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history

☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

Property is:

☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Architecture

Social History

Periods of Significance

1927-1952

Significant Dates

1927

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Williamson, Thomas Wilson

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State Agency

☐ Federal Agency

☒ Local Government

☐ University

☐ Other:

Name of repository: Topeka Fire Department Headquarters

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References

A. Zone	Easting	Northing	B. Zone	Easting	Northing
15	268384	4325750			
C. Zone	Easting	Northing	D. Zone	Easting	Northing

[] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Brenda R. Spencer
organization _____ date 21 February, 2002
street & number 10150 Onaga Road telephone 785-456-9857
city or town Wamego state Kansas zip code 66547

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

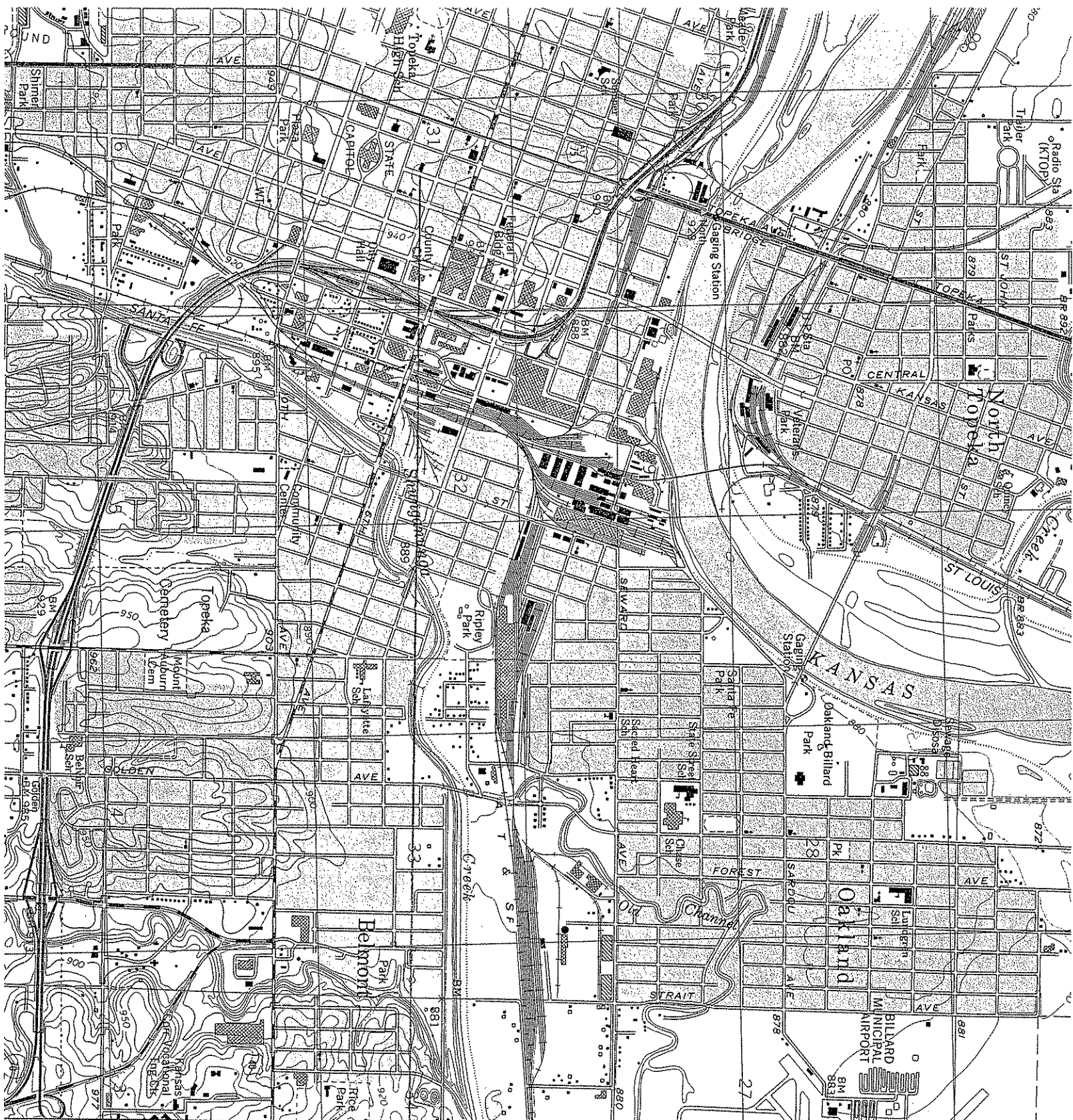
Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Kansas Trial Lawyers Association Foundation, Terry Humphrey, Executive Director
street & number 700 S.W. Jackson, Suite 706 telephone 785-232-7756
city or town Topeka state Kansas zip code 66603

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.



EKA INTERCHANGE 0.3 MI.

2730'

T 11 S

T 12 S

FIRE STATION NO. 2
719-23 VAN BUREN
TOPEKA, KANSAS
UTM ZONE 15
208384 E
4325750 N

426

(GRANTVILLE)
6862 II SE

428

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Topeka Fire Station No. 2
Shawnee County, Kansas

7. Narrative Description

Fire Station No.2 is located at 719-723 VanBuren Street, one block north of the Kansas state capital. Designed by Thomas W. Williamson in 1927 at a prolific time in his early career, the building was to serve a dual function, as Fire Department Headquarters and fire station for Company No. 2. The two and one-half story building is a Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revival structure that embodies distinctive influences of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture as illustrated by the red fire flashed Spanish tile roof and wrought iron balcony railings. The fire station was heralded as a state of the art facility, boasting modern conveniences such as the sixty foot drill tower and alarm system with its own battery room.

The concrete structure has tan brick veneer with cut ashlar stone detailing. The building's footprint is an 'L' shape. The main portion of the building is 2-1/2 stories, rectangular in shape, measuring approximately 70' x 80'. A rear ell, approximately 30' x 50' projects from the north half of the rear (west) on the first floor only, housing the shop. The most significant exterior features are the hip roof, garage door bays, multi-sash steel windows, and wrought iron balcony railings.

The building is in good condition. An extensive remodeling was completed in the late 1970s when the fire department moved and the building became home to the newly formed Topeka Emergency Communications Center (TECOM). TECOM occupied the building from 1979 until 1997; it has been vacant the past five years. The property maintains historic integrity in terms of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and feeling.

Exterior - The site of Fire Station No. 2 is comprised of three lots measuring approximately 75' x 150', located in the center of 700 block of VanBuren in downtown Topeka. The site is located one block north of the statehouse and two blocks west of Kansas Avenue (Topeka's Main Street). The site is bordered by parking lots on the north and west and an alley on the south. The front of the building faces VanBuren Street on the east, setback approximately 10' to allow engine access in and out of the garage. There is a public sidewalk along the east (front) edge of the site. A tall metal communications tower extends high above the building's roof at the southwest corner of the building, the original location of the fire department's drill tower.

The building's structure is reinforced concrete columns, beams, and floors with tile wall infill. The two and one-half story main building has a flat-topped or truncated hip roof, currently with asphalt shingles. The original hip roof was red fire flashed Spanish tile, replaced in 1967. The one-story rear ell has a flat roof with brick parapet wall that has a stone cap/coping. The flat portion of the main roof and the roof on the ell have built-up composition roofing, as originally designed. There is a brick chimney with a stone cap, near the center of the west (rear) wall of the main building. A few feet north of the chimney, the hose tower (also brick with a stone cap), also projects above the roof height. There are flat dormers projecting from the hip portion of the roof. Originally, there was a standing seam copper deck on the dormers and hose tower. The dormer windows have been removed and currently have a tar paper covering.

The two-story portion of the building has projecting eaves (painted) with beadboard soffits and wood modified scroll brackets. There is a plain ashlar cut stone frieze. Recessed lighting was built-in to the soffits, extant in some locations. The building originally had copper gutters and downspouts that transition to built-in/internal iron pipe downspouts on the front facade. Only the surface-mounted transition component (from the surface-mounted copper downspout to the internal iron pipe) is in place. The original guttering system was replaced, most likely in conjunction with the 1960s roof replacement.

The exterior masonry veneer is predominantly tan brick laid in a running or stretcher bond pattern with a

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Topeka Fire Station No. 2
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Flemish bond pattern every sixth course. The base of the building is ashlar cut gray Indiana limestone and projects slightly from the brick veneer. On the front (east) facade, masonry openings have ashlar cut buff Indiana limestone surrounds. The masonry openings (doors and windows) typically have brick flat arch lintels and ashlar cut stone sills. There are brick sills on the rear facade and one-story rear ell.

East (Front) Facade - The front facade is comprised of five bays and is symmetrical in composition. The three garage doors form the three central bays. The original garage doors were a pair of bi-fold wood paneled doors at each of the three openings. The garage doors have been replaced with standard wood paneled overhead doors with one row of glass lights. The garage bays have cone-shaped, cast iron wheel bumpers extant. Five part multi-sash steel windows with arched transoms align above each garage door. Ashlar cut stone segmental arches with projecting keystones enframe each bay. Large cut stone panels are located between the garage doors and upper windows; the center panel inscribed with 'Fire Station' and the flanking bays inscribed with the number '2'. There are twin main entrances at the two end bays. Each entry is a single door with a cut stone surround - a shaped flat arch with flush keystone. The original doors were a single multi-light wood door with a multi-light transom. The doors have been replaced with metal doors and transom panels infilled. The ashlar cut stone surrounds are buff Indiana limestone. They terminate at the gray ashlar cut stone (Indiana limestone) base. An upper-story window aligns with entrances at each end bay. The windows are multi-sash, two part steel casements with fixed transoms. At each window, there is a small stone balcony with stone scroll brackets and ornamental wrought iron railings.

North (Side) Facade

The north facade is plain with window openings forming four bays on the main portion of the building. The first and second floor windows openings align, each was a set of multi-sash, steel tripartite casement windows with fixed transoms. The only exception was a small, narrow multi-sash fixed steel window, located at the west end of the 1st floor (the original supply room). Third floor (attic) dormer windows were multi-sash tripartite steel casements, with no transoms. The two dormers align with lower windows on the two center bays. On the north facade of the rear ell, there are four window openings: originally, three pairs of multi-sash, steel awning windows and a small awning window. All first and second floor window openings on the north facade were infilled with brick veneer (over concrete block) in the 1979 remodeling. There has been a small red brick addition (approximately 6' x 10') at the west end of the north facade.

Rear (West) Facade

The rear facade and projecting ell are asymmetrical in composition. There were originally two rear garage doors, similar in configuration to the front garage doors. There was one in the workshop which has been replaced with a standard overhead door and one on the south end of the rear of the main building that has been downsized with brick veneer to accommodate a single standard steel door. The original window openings vary in size and configuration including a small window in the hose tower. All except one of the rear windows were infilled with brick veneer (over concrete block) in the 1979 remodeling. The one remaining window currently has a metal slat awning. There is a significant amount of mechanical and communication equipment on the roof of the rear ell (in addition to the tall communication tower mentioned above). There is a heavy metal railing around the equipment on the roof that is visible from the side and rear facades.

South (Side) Facade

The south facade fronts an alley. Unlike the north facade, the window openings are not symmetrical and do not form any obvious bay distinctions. First floor and attic windows are similar to those described on the south side. Second floor windows originally included tripartite windows like the lower floor in addition to, smaller awning windows and narrow fixed windows at the stairwell. Four of the original second floor windows are extant, two of

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Topeka Fire Station No. 2
Shawnee County, Kansas

which currently have metal slat awnings. All other former openings were infilled with brick veneer (over concrete block) in the 1979 remodeling.

Interior

A number of original interior finishes are intact but the configuration was altered in the 1979 remodeling. The ground floor was originally a large open space with few partition walls. The front garage doors opened into an 'apparatus room' with an overhead fire door leading to the shop in the rear ell and a garage door at the south end of the rear of the main building. A telephone booth was located between garage doors on the front wall. There were three brass fire poles, one near the center of the front wall, one in the center of the apparatus room, and one near the opening to the shop. The hose tower and toilet were located along the rear wall between the two doors. There were two staircases, both extant, one in the center of the south wall and one on the rear wall. A small supply room was located in the northwest corner of the main building and a tool room in the northeast corner of the shop. The shop featured a 'Yale Single I Beam Traveling Crane' which is still in place.

There is a partial basement, approximately the southwest quarter of the main building, accessed by the central stairs. The basement had three rooms: a boiler room on the north side and a store room and coal bin on the south side.

The entire second floor was originally divided into a variety of spaces. A corridor linked the two stairways. Along the north wall, there were three large rooms: the dormitory in the northeast corner, the locker room in the center and a recreation room in the northwest corner. The kitchen was located around the hose tower in the center of the west wall. In the southeast corner, between the two stairs was the battery room and switchboard room. There were three offices in the southeast corner and a toilet east of the south stair.

The attic was accessed from a steel stair located in the corridor between the two main staircases. The central portion of the building (with a flat roof) was reportedly used as a gymnasium and meeting room.

The only extensive documented interior alterations occurred when the station was remodeled in 1979 to accommodate the Topeka Emergency Communications Center (TECOM). On the first floor, the size of the original apparatus room was reduced as rooms were partitioned along the north, south, and rear walls, maintaining only the overhead door opening to the shop. It was at this time that the window openings were blocked in, the rear garage door converted to a single standard door, and the hose tower converted to an elevator shaft. Alterations to the second floor were more extensive. The dormitory was subdivided into three rooms; the locker room remodeled into a lounge/kitchenette and separate men and women's toilets; the corridor configuration altered/expanded to include a 'loop' within the former locker room; the kitchen removed for the elevator lobby; and office #1 altered.

The original 1927 room finishes were utilitarian and typical of the time period. There was an exposed concrete floor with a 6" concrete base on the entire first floor and the dormitory, kitchen, and battery room on the second floor, and the central portion of the attic. The two main staircases and the floors in the second floor corridors and toilet were terrazzo with integral bases. There was originally linoleum in two offices and the switchboard room and carpet in one office. Wall and ceiling finishes were generally a sand finished plaster although there were exposed brick walls and concrete ceilings in the supply room, tool room, hose tower and shop. The large apparatus room and first floor toilet have brick wainscoting on all walls and columns. The brick is tan (golden brown) with a salt glazed finish. The wainscoting is laid with a soldier course base and cap. All window openings have glazed brick stools (matching the wainscoting). The original 1927 building specifications identify the Truscan Steel Company of Youngstown, Ohio as the source for the multi-sash steel windows. The original

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Topeka Fire Station No. 2
Shawnee County, Kansas

plans illustrate four types of paneled wood doors and a number of built-in features including the brass fire poles, a telephone booth, kitchen cabinets, toilet partitions, and steel lockers.

The 1979 remodeling involved raising floors and dropping suspended ceilings. New modular panel partition walls were installed and paneling placed over some existing plaster walls. Carpet and VAT tile was installed at most second level floors. Existing florescent lighting fixtures and toilet fixtures are presumed to date to the 1979 remodeling. Although the configuration of spaces and many fixtures and finishes have been altered, there are significant original finishes and features in place.

Among the extant original finishes are the following. Most original interior partition walls (hollow tile with plaster on expanded metal lath) are in place although alterations are evident at the former locker room, kitchen and office #1 where some original walls have been removed and new openings have been made. Perimeter walls are plaster on masonry substrate and ceilings are plaster on concrete. There are some areas of peeling plaster and deterioration. Suspended ceilings on the 2nd floor have resulted in numerous penetrations in the plaster. Some concrete floors and bases have been covered with carpet and tile. The glazed brick wainscoting and window stools are in place although covered and altered in some locations. The terrazzo stairs and floors with integral base appear to be in good condition except for some chipped stair treads and minor cracks; the terrazzo in the original locker room and second level corridors is currently concealed by floor coverings and may have been altered. The south stair has cast iron newel posts and balustrades with wood handrails.

Extant original features include the multi-sash steel windows on the front (east) facade and five 2nd floor windows on the south and rear facades. There is one existing historic door, a very narrow paneled wood door south of the overhead door opening from the apparatus room to the shop. There is a row of steel lockers visible on the second floor (the original east wall of the locker room) and the original 'Yale' crane is extant in the shop. In the attic there is one pendant style light fixture in place, presumed to be original.

Alteration

The building served as home to Station No. 2 and Fire Department Headquarters for over fifty years, from its opening in 1927 until 1979. Thorough records are in place at Fire Department Headquarters that document routine maintenance and building improvements over the years. Alterations prior to the 1979 remodeling included replacement of the garage doors, the small brick addition on the west end of the north facade, removal of the original drill tower and installation of the existing communications tower, and replacement of the tile roof in 1967. In December of 1979, the Fire Department moved from the VanBuren Station. Department headquarters was moved to its current location at 324 Jefferson. Fire Station No. 2 was converted to house the Topeka Emergency Communication Center (TECOM), Topeka's newly combined fire and police dispatch and 911 center. The 1979 remodeling represents the first and only, extensive remodeling. Webb Isley of Isley and Associates in Topeka was the architect and J. A. Lundgren & Son, the general contractor. Alterations included blocking in numerous secondary windows, alteration of the interior configuration through the addition of numerous interior partition walls, suspending acoustical tile ceilings, raising some floors, and installing a variety of floor and wall coverings.

In summary, the building is in good condition and retains significant historic integrity. With the exception of replacement doors, the front (east) facade closely resembles its original appearance. Altered openings are on secondary and tertiary facades. The interior configuration and finishes have undergone alteration but a variety of historic features and finishes still exist that portray the original character of the building.

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Topeka Fire Station No. 2
Shawnee County, Kansas

8. Narrative Statement of Significance

Topeka Fire Station No. 2 is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion 'C' - Architecture and Criterion 'A' for the building's association with the growth and development of Topeka. Fire Station No. 2 is an example of an eclectic, early twentieth century fire station with Spanish Colonial Revival influences. Designed by prominent Kansas' architect Thomas W. Williamson, the station is a Late 19th and 20th Century Revival structure that embodies distinctive influences of the Spanish Colonial Revival style of architecture and is representative of the professional firehouse of the early twentieth century. Fire Station No. 2 in downtown Topeka served the city as Fire Department Headquarters and Station No. 2 for over fifty years, from its opening in 1927 until 1979. It was the first free-standing building to serve as home to headquarters and Station No. 2, joined since the formation of Station No. 2 in 1878 and formerly housed in two city halls (1878-1927).

Stylistic Influences

The fire station embodies stylistic influences of the Spanish Colonial Revival style and, as such, is categorized as a Late 19th and 20th Century Revival structure. Revival architecture is the use of older styles in new architectural movements. The term Spanish Colonial Revival is often used interchangeably with Mission Revival, Spanish Revival, and Mediterranean Revival. Their distinctions are best reviewed by tracing Spain's influences on American architecture.

The book What Style Is It? A Guide to American Architecture, notes that although a number of European countries, most notably France and the Netherlands, established colonies and left architectural legacies in North America, only Spain ranks with England in implanting lasting architectural traditions in the United States. The Spanish Colonial style flourished in southern North America, in the area colonized by Spain. The first permanent Spanish settlement was at St. Augustine, Florida in 1565. First seen in scattered locations along the Gulf Coast, the most important concentrations of Spanish colonial architecture are in the mission complexes of the Southwest. The secularization of mission lands under Mexican rule in the 1830s encouraged settlement, and the prevalent houses followed the Spanish colonial tradition. These forms fell from general use only to be revived in the 1890s. Particularly popular in California, Florida and the Southwest, the Spanish, Pueblo and Mission revival styles drew not only from the provincial forms of the missions and haciendas but also on the rounded adobe shapes and projecting timbers of the pueblos and grand buildings of Mediterranean Spain.¹

In Field Guide to American Houses, Virginia and Lee McAlester identify Spanish influences. "In the New World, Spanish colonists blended the adobe traditions of the Native Americans with similar Spanish housing traditions originally brought to Spain from North Africa. Both the Spanish Colonial Style (1600-1850) and the Pueblo Revival style (1910-present) use adobe construction techniques which show this mixing of Spanish and Native American precedents. Spanish Colonial ecclesiastical buildings of the American Southwest provided the inspiration for the Mission style (1890-1920). This was followed by the Spanish Eclectic style (1915-1940), which broadened the precedents to include the entire spectrum of Spanish-American Architecture, thus making it an unusually varied style."²

According to the McAlesters, Domestic buildings of Spanish precedent built before 1920 are generally free adaptations in the Mission style. It was not until the Panama-California Exposition, held in San Diego in 1915 that precise imitation of more elaborate Spanish prototypes received wide attention. The exposition was designed by

¹John C. Poppeliers, S.Allen Chambers, Jr. and Nancy B. Schwartz, What Style is It? A Guide to American Architecture, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1983) 24.

²Virginia & Lee McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2000), 11-12.

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Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, who had previously authored a detailed study of Spanish Colonial architecture. Goodhue wanted to go beyond the then prevalent Mission interpretations and emphasize the richness of Spanish precedents found throughout Latin America. Inspired by the wide publicity given the exposition, other fashionable architects soon began to look directly to Spain for source material. There they found a still longer and richer sequence of architectural traditions which became melded into a style that they continued to call the Spanish Colonial Revival. Because of its broad roots, the McAlesters use the name Spanish Eclectic. The style is most common in the southwestern states, primarily in regions where original Spanish Colonial building occurred and continued into the 19th Century. However, examples of Spanish Eclectic, like its predecessor, Mission Revival, are found throughout the country including a number of distinguished examples in Kansas.³

The McAlesters define the identifying features of Spanish Eclectic (commonly referred to as Spanish Colonial Revival) to include: a low-pitched roof, usually with little or no eave overhang; red tile roof covering; typically with one or more prominent arches placed above door or principal window, or beneath porch roof; wall surface usually stucco; facade normally asymmetrical. There are five principal sub-types, all based on roof shape: side-gabled, cross-gabled, combined hip and gabled, hipped, and flat. Decorative window grills of wood or iron are common, as are similar balustrades on cantilevered balconies, which occur in a variety of shapes and sizes. The style reached its apex during the 1920s and early 1930s and passed rapidly from favor during the 1940s.⁴

Fire Station No. 2 in Topeka embodies several identifying features of the Spanish Colonial Revival style - the red tile roof, the hipped roof shape, and the iron railing on the cantilevered balconies, clearly illustrating the Spanish stylistic influence. However, the station is not a distinctive representative of the style. The symmetrical, brick exterior, overhanging eaves, and the steel casement windows, typical of industrial and institutional buildings of the era, are not features and materials commonly associated with the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The overall appearance of the building is eclectic, combining a number of influences.

Architect Thomas Williamson explored a variety of styles throughout his sixty year career and seemed quite in keeping with national architectural trends. Even among Topeka buildings designed in 1926-27 (Clay and Monroe Elementary Schools, Curtis Junior High School and the Jayhawk Hotel and Theater in addition to Fire Station No. 2), Williamson's designs illustrate a number of stylistic influences. As noted on the National Register nomination for the Jayhawk Hotel and Theater complex, Williamson's design for the hotel and theater epitomized the mainstream of American architecture in the mid-1920's. The building was identified as an example of 'classical eclecticism' as Talbot Hamlin defined it in his book American Spirit in Architecture. For the architect, Hamlin claimed, "historical style was an aid only, a means to be used as the designer wished, freely or strictly." Rather than concentrating on identifying "styles", Hamlin felt that one had to consider buildings as examples of specialized building types. The Jayhawk fell into two categories, a skyscraper and, for the most part, a hotel.⁵

Designed the same year as the Jayhawk, Fire Station No. 2 could also be considered to be an example of 'classical eclecticism'. The Fire station has definite influences of the Spanish Colonial Revival style as illustrated by the red clay tile hipped roof and iron railings on the balconies and thus is categorized as a late 19th and 20th century revival structure. However, Hamlin's argument regarding buildings as building types seems quite

³Ibid, 418.

⁴Ibid, 417-18.

⁵Julie A. Workman, Dale Nimz and Nora Pat Small, "National Register Nomination for the Jayhawk Hotel and Theater Complex" (Topeka, KS: Kansas State Historical Society, 1982), Sec.8, pp. 2-3.

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Topeka Fire Station No. 2
Shawnee County, Kansas

applicable to the Fire Station as well as the hotel. It was the function of the building as a fire station that impacted its appearance, more than an architectural stylistic influence. Fire Station No. 2 and the Jayhawk Hotel and Theater were recognized as state of the art facilities - outstanding examples of their respective building types. It is appropriate to examine the history of fire service and early twentieth century firehouses to further understand the influences on the design of Fire Station No.2.

Fire Service in Topeka and Early Twentieth Century Firehouses

From its founding in 1854 to 1870, the City of Topeka had no organized fire service. After the destruction of two buildings by fire in 1869 (the S.D. McDonald building and the 'Ritchie Block'), fire protection became a priority. The city purchased their first fire engine (Silsby) and two hose carts in 1870 and later that year, organized the first volunteer companies.⁶ Tobias Billings was appointed 'Chief Engineer' in 1870; he, along with an assistant and the engineer of the steamer, formed the first fire department. A blacksmith shop in the 500 block of Quincy Street was converted to serve as home to the fire department. In 1872 George Wilmarth succeeded Billings as chief, with the goal of an efficient, paid department.⁷

The need for stations grew with the city in order to reduce response time to fire calls. Fire Station No. 1 was built in North Topeka in 1874. The first fire department headquarters, together with Station No. 2 was planned for the rear of the new City Hall, opening in 1878 at Kansas Avenue and 7th Street. Fire Station No.3 was constructed in the 300 block of Jefferson in 1882 (the current location of department headquarters). In 1887, Fire Station No. 4 was built in the 700 block of Clay and in 1890, Station No. 5 built in the 600 block of Lake Street.⁸

In 1900 headquarters and Station No. 2 took over the north wing of the new City Hall and Auditorium on Quincy, between 7th and 8th. A number of additional stations were constructed to serve the needs of a growing city. The department headquarters and Station No. 2 remained at City Hall on Quincy until 1927 when the existing building was razed to clear a site for the present city building. It was at this time that a new building was planned to house department headquarters and Station No. 2.⁹ No documentation has been found regarding the reasoning behind the decision to build a free standing station to house fire department headquarters and Station No.2. It is possible that the reason has more to do with the needs of the new City Hall being constructed on the same site as the former City Hall and Fire Station.

The American Firehouse. An Architectural and Social History by Rebecca Zurier provides an excellent overview of the evolution of fire stations. In the late 1800s, the red brick fire station was the norm. Builders had constructed fire stations of brick before the Civil War, but after 1870 red brick architecture, incorporating new styles taken from industrial and commercial design, came to dominate municipal building.¹⁰ By the turn of the century, fire station design entered a phase of elaborate design that Zurier labels 'Castles and Palaces, Eclectic Architecture, Politics, and Sentiment 1890-1918.' The stocky, industrial designs of the red brick stations were left behind as firehouses began to resemble mediaeval castles, French chateaux, Italian palaces, and Swiss

⁶Topeka Daily Capital, 20 November, 1927.

⁷Oscar K. Swayze, Fire Service of Topeka The Early Years, (Topeka, KS: Shawnee County Historical Society, Bulletin No. 63 - November, 1986), 7.

⁸Daniel Fitzgerald, "Inventory Records of the Topeka Fire Department" (Topeka, KS, 1986), 2.

⁹Swayze, 113.

¹⁰Rebecca Zurier, The American Firehouse. An Architectural and Social History, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982) 89.

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chalets.¹¹ The unique function and symbolism of fire stations set them apart from other public buildings. Perhaps no other type of building illustrates the imaginative possibilities of eclecticism so well. Since there was no prevailing opinion on the "proper" style for a fire station, architects tried nearly all of them.¹²

Zurier defines 'The Beginnings of the Modern Fire Station, Motorization and the Bungalow' as the period between 1905-1940 and 1925-1940 is classified as 'Streamline and Specialization, Conflicting ideas in the 1930's.' These two period encompass the time in which Topeka's Fire Station No. 2 was constructed (1927). Although the period saw architect's adopting a variety of architectural styles, the Bungalow period focuses primarily on the design of stations for residential areas and therefore does not directly relate to stylistic influences on Fire Station No. 2. And even though Station No. 2 does not embody the modernistic tendencies of the 'Streamline and Specialization' era, the influence of the emergence of a new degree of professionalism in fire station design is clearly illustrated.

When it came time to build new stations designed for motorized apparatus in the cities, architects often turned to an imagery different from the urban castles and palaces of an earlier generation. These new modern buildings projected a message that firefighting was to be regarded as a technical business, involving new kinds of machines operated by highly trained men. The idea corresponds to a growing professionalism and specialization in the fire department and city government as a whole. It was during this time that trained professionals moved into the field of city government, as voters sought to replace corrupt mayors and councils with disinterested experts. Joining the commissioners and managers were a new crop of professional city planners.¹³

For the fire department, the influence of professional city managers and planning in the 1920s and 1930s came as much from the changed attitude they brought as from any specific recommendations they made. While fire departments theoretically had been run by professionals since the end of the volunteer system, much of their traditional image carried over from the nineteenth century. Fire departments, historically one of the most conservative and tradition-bound branches of government, tried to go along with the new spirit in municipal administration. Changes in procedure included an emphasis on professional training of firemen and public education in fire prevention.¹⁴

The new mood of specialization and professionalism in government that affected the fire service extended to its architecture as well. The most striking example was George Ernest Robinson, a Boston architect who billed himself as a specialist in the design of fire stations. He translated this interest into a careful study of the architectural requirements of the modern fire department and devised new standards for fire station design. One of Robinson's earliest and most publicized fire stations - the headquarters at Arlington, Massachusetts, completed in 1926 - is also one of his most interesting designs. It incorporates many features that Robinson either invented or was among the first to employ, which would characterize up-to-date fire stations for the next twenty years. Robinson designed the new central station to house five pieces of equipment (including a police ambulance), with room for three more. The idea of planning a station with the future expansion of the city in mind was a new one, and shows the influence of the city planning movement at work. In his later articles, Robinson advised architects to allow room for auxiliary equipment, with a separate door to permit access without

¹¹Ibid, 119.

¹²Ibid, 131.

¹³Ibid, 173-174.

¹⁴Ibid, 176.

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moving the other apparatus. His suggestion caught on, as downtown stations were built with four, six, and even seven apparatus doors, and space was provided for more chiefs cars, squad trucks, and rescue vehicles inside. In addition to the apparatus room, the ground-floor rooms in Arlington reflected the changing needs of the department. The city's central alarm equipment was housed in a separate wing at the back of the building. Robinson fitted the basement at Arlington with a fully equipped machine shop, complete with hoists, where men could work on their apparatus.¹⁵

Robinson continued the turn-of-the century idea of providing men with as many comforts as possible. In some stations Robinson included basement bowling alleys, separate washrooms, laundry rooms, and cedar-lined closets for storing bedding. Keeping in shape was still considered an important part of the fireman's regimen; stations built during the 1920s and 1930s continued to include gyms or handball courts, but rather than provide a bowling alley they were more likely to have a training tower where men could practice firefighting skills. He continued to follow the basic arrangement of rooms that had been used since the days of horse-drawn equipment. Robinson kept the ground floor for apparatus and a few offices and confined all living quarters to the upper stories.¹⁶ Ironically, except for the apparatus doors, Robinson's stations could pass for enlarged versions of nineteenth century firehouses. Robinson was the first architect known to specialize in fire station design and set the precedent, particularly regarding interior layout and design, through the 1940s.

Subtitled by Zurier, 'Conflicting Ideas in the 1930's', the 'Streamline and Specialization' era, from 1925-1945 was a period of transition and varying stylistic influences. Fire stations built during the depression show a number of conflicting ideas and images at work, there was little agreement among fire chiefs in the thirties as to a preferred layout or set of equipment nor did the public share one idea of how a fire station ought to look. The decisions seems to be left to architects, who responded with a variety of designs.¹⁷ However, it was also in the 1930s that other architects devised new forms to reflect the changes taking place both in the function of the fire department and in building technology. Modern designs emerged which did not imitate any of the great buildings of the past but instead intended to evoke the image of machines, power, and energy. Fire Stations built under the W.P.A. included examples of all the different trends in design at work in the 1930s. They range from streamlined to colonial to renovations of nineteenth century structures, with an assortment of domestic styles in the suburbs. The 1930s modernism was different from the creative eclecticism of the turn-of the century. The buildings exalted not the fireman's heroism but his skill. Real change did not come for another generation when post WWII brought technological developments which led to the modern fire station as we know it today.¹⁸

Fire Station No. 2

Built in 1927, Topeka's Fire Station No. 2 truly represents the contradictions common to fire station design of the era. It was a professionally designed structure touted to be a state-of-the-art facility complete with modern conveniences. From the multiple apparatus doors to the interior layout including the shop, alarm equipment room, dormitory, kitchen, and gymnasium, as well as the exterior drill tower, Station No. 2 was similar to Robinson's model of the professional firehouse. Stylistically, the Spanish influences are predominant but combined with the symmetrical facade and industrial steel windows, the building can only be categorized as eclectic.

¹⁵Ibid, 179-181.

¹⁶Ibid, 183.

¹⁷Ibid, 173.

¹⁸Ibid, 185-205.

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Citizens of Topeka authorized bonds at a special election in November of 1926 for the acquisition of sites and the construction of a new station and headquarters building. Lot #235 and the N.½ of #237 on Van Buren Street was purchased from J.T. and Ruth Turner and Harry and Maude Buff for the price of \$7,500. Lot #239 and the S.½ of 237 was purchased from the Topeka Edison Co. for the price of \$8,000.¹⁹

Thos. W. Williamson & Co. was the architect hired to design the station, R. A. Finney was the Consulting Engineer. Constructed at a cost of \$90,000, the new building was completed in 1927. The new building served as the first freestanding joint facility (the others were within City Hall) to house Fire Department Headquarters and Station #2. The station was sometimes referred to as headquarters station or central station. Joseph Waidelic was fire chief at the time.

An article in the October 8, 1927 *Topeka Daily State Journal*, boasted that "The new headquarters fire station at 721-23 VanBuren Street, which is now ready for occupancy, is said by fire experts to be one of the finest in the United States. In convenience and completeness, it is the last word in fire station design, the builders assert." The brick exterior with stone detailing is accented by a red fire flashed Spanish tile roof. The interior was plainly finished, primarily for the convenience of the firemen.²⁰

The new station was a state of the art facility, designed for convenience. The ground floor accommodated the aerial ladder and hose trucks, as well as a supply room and workshop. The second floor housed offices for the chiefs and clerks, a dormitory, locker room and showers for the men, and a modern kitchen. The third floor attic provided a gymnasium and meeting space. An instrument room was located on the second floor; it featured a new Gamewell fire alarm system with repeater boards like those "used in all large cities". The new site also featured a sixty-foot tall steel drill tower, designed to be the same height as Topeka's five story buildings.²¹

A guest register documents over seven hundred in attendance for the opening day of the station on the 14th of October, 1927 and is in the archives of the Fire Department Headquarters. The building served as home to Fire Department Headquarters and Station No. 2 from it opening in 1927 until 1979, when it was converted to the Topeka Emergency Communication Center (TECOM). In December of 1979, fire department headquarters moved to its current location at 324 Jefferson - formerly occupied by the Training Division and adjacent to the complex including Station No.3 and the Maintenance and Training Division's Academy. The building has stood vacant the past five years, since TECOM moved in 1997.

Thomas Wilson Williamson

In *Builders of Topeka* (1934), Walt Markley wrote, "Probably no firm of architects in Kansas has designed more schools and other public buildings in Kansas in the last twenty years than that of Thomas W. Williamson & Co."²² Thomas W. Williamson was called the "grand daddy of Kansas architects" in a 1952 Topeka Capital article. The article referred to Williamson's firm, with a staff of 46 architects, draftsmen and engineers, as "one of the best-known and most successful architectural firms in the mid-west."²³

¹⁹"Station #2 file" (Topeka, KS: Fire Department Headquarters).

²⁰*Topeka Daily State Journal*, 8 October, 1927.

²¹Ibid.

²²Walt Markley. *Builders of Topeka*. (Topeka, KS: The Capper Printing Co., 1934), 264.

²³*Topeka Capital Journal*, 21 September, 1952.

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Thomas Wilson Williamson was born August 4, 1887 in Hiawatha, Kansas (son of Leaman Wilson and Rebecca Ella McCulloch Williamson). He graduated from Topeka High School in 1907, attended the University of Pennsylvania and returned to Topeka in 1911. He worked in the state architect's office for a short time and spent one year working for John F. Stanton, a leading Topeka architect, before opening his own firm in April of 1912. His first office was a single room over the Topeka State Bank at 8th and Kansas; two years later he moved his offices to the Central National Bank Building.

Williamson practiced in Topeka for nearly 60 years. His firm designed numerous public and commercial buildings in and around Topeka including more than 30 schools, 14 churches, 4 hospitals, and over 50 business buildings. In addition to Fire Station No. 2, outstanding examples of Williamson's work in Topeka include the First National Bank Building, the First Methodist Church, the Jayhawk Hotel and Theater, the Mulvane Art Museum, the Masonic Temple, and the Methodist Episcopal Home. Williamson also designed the Cheyene, Jackson, Labette, Sheriden and Smith County Courthouses in Kansas. Williamson specialized in the design of schools from early in his career. He is perhaps best known for his design of Topeka High School. He also designed Clay, Monroe and Sumner Elementary Schools and Curtis Junior High in Topeka. In addition to schools in the Topeka area, Williamson designed schools in a number of Kansas cities including: Buffville, Burlington, Caney, Chanute, Coffeyville, Delia, Iola, Independence, Johnson County, Leavenworth, Parsons, Pittsburg, Toronto, and Westphalia. The years of 1926-27 were a prolific time in Williamson's career. During this period, he designed a number of prominent Topeka buildings including: Clay and Monroe Elementary Schools, Curtis Junior High School and the Jayhawk Hotel and Theater in addition to Fire Station No. 2.

Four Kansas buildings designed by Williamson are listed on the National Register and one of the State Register. The Jayhawk Hotel, Theater and Walk (Topeka, 1926) were listed on the National Register in 1982. Curtis Junior High School (Topeka, 1927) was listed on the National Register in 2001 and two Topeka elementary schools, Sumner and Monroe (1936 and 1926 respectively), were designated National Historic Landmarks in 1987 and 1991 respectively. The latter two schools are known less for their architecture than the fact that they served as the focus for the dispute which led to the 1954 landmark segregation case, Brown versus Topeka Board of Education. The First National Bank (535 Kansas Avenue, demolished in 1995) in Topeka, designed by Chicago firm K.M. Vitzthum & Co. with Thomas Williamson serving as supervising architect, was listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places in 1990.

A leader in civic affairs, Williamson was instrumental in the creation of the Kansas Architects Registration and Examining Board and served as its first secretary. He retired in 1970 and continued to reside in Topeka until his death in November, 1974. His obituary in the Topeka Daily Capital noted, "Few men have had the satisfaction of looking about themselves and being able to see living monuments to their life's work. Tom Williamson...was such a man. His life was full and he devoted his talents to building a better future."²⁴

Summary -

Fire Station No.2 is significant as an example of an eclectic early twentieth century fire station that served the city of Topeka for over fifty years. As such, it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion 'C' - Architecture and Criterion 'A' for its association with the growth and development of Topeka. The fire station is a Late 19th and 20th Century Revival structure that embodies Spanish Colonial Revival stylistic influences and is representative of the professional early twentieth century firehouse. Designed by Kansas architect Thomas Wilson Williamson, the station is an excellent example of Williamson's work during a prolific time in his fifty plus year career. Formerly housed within two city halls (1878-1927), the 1927 station was the first freestanding facility to house Fire Department Headquarters and Station No.2. Station No. 2 and department headquarters

²⁴Topeka Daily Capital 22 November, 1974.

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were housed together from the establishment of Station No. 2 in 1878. The VanBuren location served this function until the building was converted to Topeka Emergency Communication Center (TECOM) headquarters in 1979.

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Thos. W. Williamson and Co. and R.A. Finney Consulting Engineer. "Plans of Fire Station for Company No. 2, 1926." Plans available at the Kansas Collection, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence, Kansas.

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The legal description of the site is:
Section 31, Township 11, Range 16, Southeast Quarter
Lots 235, 237, 239 on VanBuren Street in the original town subdivision
City of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries represent the original site acquired by the City of Topeka to build the Fire Station in 1927.

Additional Documentation- Photographs

Except where noted, all photographs were taken February 5, 2002 by Brenda Spencer. Spencer holds the original negatives.

Photo # Description of Views, [] indicates camera direction

- 1 Front (east) facade from NE corner with Kansas State Capital in background [southwest]
- 2 Front (east) facade [west]
- 3 North (side) facade [south]
- 4 West (rear) facade [east]
- 5 West and South facade from SW corner [northeast]
- 6 Window, gutter and eave detail on east (front) facade [west]
- 7 Window detail on South (side) facade [northwest]
- 8 Eave detail on South (side) facade [northwest]
- 9 Interior view of 1st floor from inside garage doors [southwest]
- 10 Interior view of workshop at rear of 1st floor [northwest]
- 11 Interior view of garage doors [east]
- 12 Interior view of south front entrance [east]
- 13 Interior view, inside north front entrance (1979 remodeling) [northwest]
- 14 Interior view along north wall of 1st floor (1979 remodeling) [east]
- 15 Detail of glazed brick and paneled wood door, 1st floor [west]
- 16 Terrazzo stairway, central area of 1st floor [west]
- 17 Terrazzo stairway at south wall, 1st floor [west]
- 18 Detail of south terrazzo stairway [northwest]
- 19 2nd floor terrazzo landing, steel stair to 3rd floor attic [southeast]
- 20 Original metal lockers (terrazzo floor) on 2nd floor [north]
- 21 Interior view 1979 remodeling, 2nd floor [north]
- 22 2nd floor bath, terrazzo floor [south]
- 23 Window detail on south side, 2nd floor [southwest]
- 24 Window detail on east (front), 2nd floor [southeast]
- 25 Front (east) elevation [northwest], 1960s

Source: Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas